

Asking for A Friend:

Over the last couple of weeks, we looked at a few questions that perhaps have crossed your mind - or someone you know – and we’ve attempted to offer a biblically based response.

I appreciate the fact that we don’t shy away from hard questions here – we’ve talked about money and sex and divorce; we’ve given time on Sunday morning to delve into hot button issues, like mental health and politics. You might not like our answers - but at least you can’t claim that we avoid the hard stuff.

So over the last couple of weeks, we grapples with hell and how a loving God can create and send people there, (he doesn’t) last week we unpacked the seeming discord between science and faith and today we’re going to talk about an issue that has plagued the church since the very beginning.

Does it matter what we believe as long as we are sincere? Asking for a friend...

Is Jesus the only way?

What is most interesting to me, is that the people who ask that question are Christians. And I suspect it is because they love and care about someone who has not yet said yes to Jesus.

That includes a lot of us in the room this morning.

Father, as Christians, those who have trusted Jesus for our life here and into eternity, we want to be faithful with the gospel and we want to live humbly and peacefully with those who don’t believe like we do. Teach us this morning how to live in that tension.

Many houses ago I lived down in Springville – now if you are from Springville a few well-known landmarks could get you to my house with no problem.

“Log church, blind corner, up the hill, cemetery., first on the right. BAM! “

If you were coming from Bloomington, there was only one way I told people to come.

It was NOT the GPS direction – this was early days of GPS at least for Springville and they had a couple of roads in the system that had not existed for 60 years at least.

Invariably, I’d give directions to my Bloomington friends – PLEASE go this way.

And invariably, 30 minutes after the party started I'd get a call

"I logged your address into my Garmin and now I'm in Hobbieville."

"Sorry – just turn around and go home. I told you the way and you ignored me and my wisdom – be gone!"

Is Jesus the only way?

1. Most in this room would agree. We accept Jesus on his own terms.
2. We know that most of the world gives a different answer, and it can be awkward to believe something that is not universally accepted.
3. In our own community there are a few churches who would give a different answer than the one we give.
4. Being at odds with our neighbors and friends can cause us to just keep our beliefs to ourselves. No politics or religion.
5. Saying Jesus is the only way gets you called arrogant and narrowminded. And in some parts of the world it can be considered hate speech.

The thought goes like this:

"Religion is important in our lives, but it can become a danger to society when people claim that their religion is the basis for their opinions and actions."

In other words you can wear the title of your religion but you can't let it affect how you think and what you do.

The problem is that if there IS only one way to eternal life – it is important that the world know that. Much more important than sparing someone's feelings or challenging their beliefs. And if that someone is someone we love, it is even more important to get this right.

Often this question is framed around Christianity and Hinduism, or Islam, or Buddhism.

And that framing matters sometimes - in Bloomington, that may rightly be the direction Matt is preaching towards,

But here in Lawrence County, you are likely to go years without meeting a practicing Buddhist.

Instead, you are likely to know and care about someone, who helps out at the pancake breakfast and gives towards the some good causes, he works hard and takes care of his family, he believes in God to the point that SOMETHING us up there, but beyond that he lives his life, doesn't hassle his neighbors and generally is a decent people

Maybe that's you. If so at your funeral I will happily say all of those things.

But what I hope and pray to say is that Jesus was Lord of your Life.

The Muslim, the Jew, the Hindu, the Buddhist are still – in a sense – theoretical – they are “over there.”

But that guy – or gal – lives beside you, works with you, and you love them and you want to see them with you in heaven.

So is it enough, to be generally decent, enough to impress God enough to let you I not heaven.

I know what I would like to say: “ sure, God will weigh your good and bad and which ever is heaviest that's the direction you head.”

But I know what the Bible says – all have sinned, none are righteous, except Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is no other Savior, because there is no other person who is qualified to save.

I also know that HOW we communicate what the Bible says matters – it matters to them and it matters to Jesus.

But we begin with the Bible:

What Does the Bible Actually Say?

It's impossible to make that case that Jesus is NOT the only way to God:

Jesus

John 14:6

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Peter

Acts 4:12.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Paul

I Corinthians 3:11

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Timothy

I Timothy 2:5

“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Jesus, Paul, Peter, Timothy

No other way.

No other name.

No other foundation.

No other mediator

Jesus is plan A and there is no plan B

Sin creates a bottomless chasm that separates us from God– no one – not even the really good guys, are good enough to bridge that separation on their own – the need a bridge – a mediator.

Looking for a way across that bottomless sin canyon? There is only one route– Jesus.

Jesus – through his obedience to the father, his willing submission to death on the cross, and his resurrection victory over death, became the ONE WAY to God.

There is no Plan B

But don't you think God will honor their sincerity:

Listen God loves sincerity -

Romans 12:9: "Love must be sincere"

1 Timothy 1:5: "Faith must be sincere"

Hebrews 10:22-23: "Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith"

But sincerity alone is never enough.

Years ago we all learned that $2 + 2 = 4$. It doesn't equal 5 or 3, no matter how sincere you are.

You can be sincerely wrong.

Sincerity cannot save us – only Jesus can do that.

How Do We Communicate This?

For most of us it is not that we have trouble believing this for OURSELVES, it's how to we communicate this with the people we love who disagree with us.

So how do we explain this belief without driving them further from Jesus?

Don't be afraid. (Don't be afraid of being afraid)

Ephesians 6:19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Be Bold - The truth is good news – don't be afraid of that

Don't be afraid of the person you are sharing it with. And you're sharing it with someone God has brought to you. God seems to think you can be trusted with this next step in their journey to Him.

Don't be afraid:

Fear makes us defensive.

When we are defensive we get weird -

We think we have to PROVE something or FORCE something, and we don't have to do. The world already thinks we're know-it -all's. Don't engage in rancorous conversations.

Be gentle

Release the pressure on them and you– God loves them more than you do. Trust his process and your place in it.

You are not an apologist on a stage debating the worlds most well know atheist.

Close your mouth, open your ears, listen to them, listen to God, and let God lead the conversation.

You aren't compromising your own faith by being friends with someone with no faith. You aren't betraying Jesus when you become friends with a Hindu.

Don't be afraid, be gentle just relax, but do be prepared.

1 Peter 3:15 NIV

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

How can you prep for that eventual conversation?

Study – open the bible and study the reasons for your faith – know what you believe and why you believe it.

Join a Bible Study

Stay connected with other believers through worship and fellowship

Pray

What happens if they reject the truth?

They will! People need processing time – you did!

Even Paul and his Damascus road experience was set up by his encounter with Christians along the way – he had to witness and process Stephens faith long before he experienced his own.

So don't walk into a conversation thinking they will drop to their knees asking what must they do to be saved. (Unless you're both in prison and the gates fall off their hinges)

No matter the response, Stay kind - don't get defensive. Don't get into religious arguments!!!

II Timothy 2:24-25

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

It is not your excellent exegesis and relational reasoning that will bring them to Jesus = that is the job of the Holy Spirit – God will bring them to repentance; we just get to be his witness along the way.

It's easy to be a witness when your surrounded by people who agree with you.

But increasingly we live in a world and community where that is not the case.,

The truth is, more and more we see people choosing to be spiritual in their own way.

My hunch is that religious rituals and lip-service lost its allure.

That's not a bad thing – Jesus himself had no patience for that kind of religious play-acting.

And we don't want that for them either, but we do want them to know Jesus.

The way and the truth and the LIFE.

So we can't run from the opportunity to share him with others:

A) Fill Yourself with the Word

Make sure you know what you believe. Don't just read the Bible. Study it. Learn it. Memorize it. Let the Word of God be the firm foundation for your own life and also for your family.

B) Be Bold and Gentle

That may seem like an oxymoron, but it's important.

Claiming Jesus as the only way can make people uncomfortable and perhaps even angry, but better they reject the truth because it is truth, and not because you were sort a jerk about it.

Hosea 11:4

I led them with cords of kindness,

with the bands of love,

and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws,

and I bent down to them and fed them.

God is so gentle with those who need him.

If God doesn't use force or threats we cant either.

But neither should we compromise on what we know to be true.

If Jesus is truly the only way, the unkindest thing would be keep it to ourselves.

If Jesus is truly the only way, the most loving thing is to share it with others.

God's heart is wide but the gate is narrow. Both are true.

The way to the Father is only Jesus and Jesus only.

No plan B